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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Statement submitted by American Psychological Association, International Association for Women's Mental Health, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Council of Psychologists, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, International Union of Psychological Science, Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, National Council of Women of the United States, Soroptimist International, World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, World Federation for Mental Health and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2008/1.

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Statement

We, the international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and members of the NGO Committee on Mental Health, affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO) in consultative relationship with the United Nations, are committed to the promotion of mental health, psychological and societal well-being, the prevention and treatment of mental illness and emotional distress, and the improvement in the delivery and quality of mental health services through advocacy and education at the United Nations. Historically, mental health has been overlooked or minimized in discussions at the UN. The importance of maintaining full mental health for all people is recognized by the World Health Organization in its Constitution when it states that "*health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition*; and that *the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and States.*"

The NGO Committee on Mental Health and other NGO colleagues affiliated with the Economic and Social Council recognize the crucial role of "financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women" of all ages in achieving optimal human development and human rights. Mental health, so dependent upon economic, social and political forces, is essential to realizing that goal. Because of the broad range of concerns that challenge women, financing the promotion of psychosocial well-being must be embedded in activities designed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. These activities must address the following:

- systemic discrimination and violence across the life span;
- limited access to appropriate and affordable mental and physical health care;
- limited access to education;
- inequitable social development;
- economic injustice and poverty;
- limited attention to their post-conflict and disaster needs; and
- denial of their human right to peace, security and protection.

Recommended Action Priorities

Fiscal policies have been inattentive to these challenges, and allocation of funds has been grossly insufficient. The following action priorities are designed to address financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women to correct this reality:

- Civil society must work to accelerate the implementation at local, regional and national levels of all previous international commitments at local, regional and national levels, enhancing the capacity to mainstream the financing of gender-sensitive mental health issues;

- Women must play an instrumental role in all policy development, decision-making and program implementation;
- Governments must improve gender responsive budget allocations and tracking methods for more effective financial accountability and funding streams dedicated to crucial educational and mental health needs of women across the life-span;
- Innovative funding strategies, constructive policy initiatives and new partnerships among civil society, industry and governments must be identified to redress devastating social inequities and close the huge financial gaps between men and women;
- Investment in research-based "best practices," such as UNIFEM's microcredit finance programs, must be increased.

Ending economic dependency and poverty are fundamental steps in promoting human psychological stability and independent life-skills, as well as increasing women's self-esteem and future leadership capabilities. Economic self-sufficiency improves access to educational opportunities and quality mental and physical health care. Research suggests that financial support of women not only measurably improves their overall well-being, but has a positive effect on their families and communities.

Contact: mentalhealthngo@worldnet.att.net

Website: http://www.mentalhealthngo.org